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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: FRUSTRATION INCREASES AT FRENCH PRESIDENCY

REF: PARIS 216

Classified By: Wallace Bain, Political Officer, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Remi Marechaux, Africa Advisor at the French Presidency, on February 23 expressed his growing frustration with the lack of movement on Madagascar. He strongly criticized SADC mediator Chissano for not doing more, on a sustained basis, to drive the parties towards an agreement. He was equally critical of Rajoelina, although he said that Rajoelina, via a February 16 letter to AU Chairman Ping, agreed to work within the Maputo/Addis Ababa framework to arrive at a consensual way forward. Marechaux said that France now favored a return to that framework as well. Marechaux also criticized French lawyer/businessman Robert Bourgi, who Marechaux claimed had advised Rajoelina to seek money from Libya, with the Libyans puzzled by the request.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Presidential Africa Advisor Remi Marechaux on February 23 briefed Africa Watcher and Assistant on President Sarkozy's visit the next day to Gabon (reftel), after which we asked for an update on Madagascar. The normally cool and even-tempered Marechaux abruptly shifted gears, visibly frustrated and exasperated by what he termed a "complete lack of movement" on Madagascar. He first criticized SADC mediator Chissano, saying several times that he was not doing anything to advance the process. Marechaux said that the task of bringing the Malgache parties to agreement was a "full-time job" and that Chissano regrettably was not displaying the requisite energy and did not seem to have even the necessary interest. In Marechaux's view, Chissano was putting other activities ahead of his mediation role, frequently postponing Madagascar-related meetings. Marechaux said that Chissano should find a high-level deputy who could pursue the mediation on a full-time basis but he was not confident that that would happen.

¶3. (C) Repeating earlier criticism, Marechaux said that Chissano's poor handling of Maputo III (the event Rajoelina boycotted) was partly responsible for the breakdown of the process. Providing one example, he noted how the text of Maputo III significantly misinterpreted what the parties had earlier accepted regarding the two co-presidents. The earlier text set forth an arrangement where the two co-presidents operated together at a level below the president, whereas Maputo III, which was supposed to repeat elements of the earlier agreements, contained a provision making the president and two co-presidents members of one single body. Marechaux said that Chissano's failure to capture in Maputo III elements such as this that the parties had earlier accepted was a major error (whether deliberate or careless Marechaux could not say), and provided Rajoelina ample grounds for considering Maputo III a repudiation of the earlier agreements.

¶4. (C) Marechaux was nearly as strongly critical of Rajoelina as he had been of Chissano, saying that Rajoelina was intransigent and did not seem to understand the need to

make concessions in order to deliver an agreement to everyone's benefit. Marechaux said, however, that Rajoelina seemed to be coming around, and he provided a copy of a February 16 letter from Rajoelina to AU Chairman Ping in which Rajoelina appeared to agree to return to the Maputo/Addis Ababa framework and work with Ping and the others. (Note: We have sent a copy of this letter to the Department and Embassy Antananarivo. End note.) To Marechaux's dismay, there had been little follow-up to Rajoelina's letter, either by Ping or Chissano. Marechaux stated that at one point the French encouraged Rajoelina strongly to work with Ping. To counter Rajoelina's apparent discomfort at working with the AU ("the Malgache have always viewed themselves as distinct from Africa and Africans"), the French said that Ping's Afro-Asian background in fact made him very much like a Malgache.

¶5. (C) Marechaux said that France favored returning to the Maputo/Addis Ababa framework as a point of departure. (Note: The French had once claimed that Maputo/Addis Ababa was dead but found themselves isolated and have dropped that position. End note.) He repeated the need for all parties to return to work, and he especially repeated his hope that Chissano would become more active and as soon as possible.

¶6. (C) Marechaux offered a final scathing criticism of French lawyer, businessman, and reputed behind-the-scenes-fixer Robert Bourgi, often viewed as a throwback figure to the classic "France-Afrique" era (the vestiges of which are still with us). Marechaux called Bourgi a "mercenary" always out for his own interest as he worked to gain favor with African leaders such as Gabon's

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Bongo and, more recently, Rajoelina. Marechaux said that Bourgi had suggested to Rajoelina that Libya might be a source of funding, which prompted Rajoelina, according to Marechaux, to approach the Libyans to request some 200,000 euro (about USD 270,000). The Libyans reportedly responded with bewilderment and did not provide the money. Marechaux referred to a photo of a public event in Madagascar that showed Bourgi and his associates a row or two down from where Rajoelina was sitting, which caused Marechaux to denounce them for contributing to speculation that France was secretly controlling Rajoelina behind the scenes. Marechaux also forcefully denied reports that the French were trying to obtain DRC support for Rajoelina. He elaborated that during a recent visit by the DRC Foreign Minister, the Presidency's Africa cell discussed the lack of progress in Madagascar's political stalemate and pointed out the discrepancies Chissano permitted (as noted above) in the hope that the DRC, as the current SADC Chair, could help push the process forward. Marechaux continued to criticize Bourgi and his ilk but, in order to avoid provoking another tirade, we refrained from pointing out that according to the press, Bourgi was going to travel to Gabon with Sarkozy in Sarkozy's plane.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Every time we speak to Marechaux about Madagascar, his frustration and exasperation seem to go up a notch or two, which is perhaps understandable given the nature of the crisis and the difficult role the French are perceived as having chosen to play. However, his main point -- that all parties need to make a sustained effort to move towards a solution and that the outside mediators need to do more to drive this process -- came through loud and clear.
END COMMENT.

¶8. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
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